

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 06160

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PINT, NU, PN
SUBJECT: TALK WITH TORRIJOS

1. IN COURSE OF A FAREWELL CALL ON GENERAL TORRIJOS LAST NIGHT, HE ASKED ME TO CONVEY HIS THINKING ON THE SANDINISTA GUERRILLAS WHO HAD JUST ARRIVED. HE MADE POINT OF THE FACT THAT, IN HIS OPINION, THESE PEOPLE WERE NOT COMMUNISTS BUT RATHER INTENSE NATIONALISTS WHO WANT A BETTER DEAL FOR THEIR PEOPLE. TORRIJOS SAID IT WAS URGENT THAT THE UNITED STATES EXERT PRESSURE ON SOMOZA TO OPEN UP HIS REGIME TO DEMOCRATIC PROCEDURES. HE BELIEVES VAST MAJORITY OF NICARAGUANS WOULD WELCOME SOMOZA'S DEPARTURE FROM THE SCENE. AND ONLY THE U.S. HAS THE NECESSARY INFLUENCE TO WORK EFFECTIVELY TOWARD THAT END. HE SAID IT WOULD BE PARTICULARLY USEFUL IF A HIGH-LEVEL APPROACH COULD BE MADE TO SOMOZA BY A HIGH-RANKING U.S. MILITARY FIGURE SUCH AS SOUTHCOM CINC GENERAL MC AULIFFE.

2. TORRIJOS SAID HE HAD DISARMED THE ARRIVING GUERRILLAS.
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HE WILL KEEP THEM IN THE GUARDIA HEADQUARTERS AREA AT TOCUMEN AIRPORT AS LONG AS POSSIBLE. BUT HE SAID HE COULD NOT KEEP THEM IN CUSTODY TOO LONG. HE MENTIONED NO TIME. HE ALSO MADE CLEAR THAT THE NICARAGUANS WANT TO REMAIN IN PANAMA, NOT GO TO CUBA. HE WANTS TO HELP THE SANDINISTAS IN EVERY WAY POSSIBLE BECAUSE HE THINKS THEIR CAUSE IS JUST. BUT HE WANTS TO WORK WITH US IN SOLVING

THIS PROBLEM. HE IS ALSO COOPERATING CLOSELY WITH VENEZUELA'S ANDRES PEREZ. TORRIJOS HAS NO DOUBT THAT THE SANDINISTAS, ONCE RELEASED IN PANAMA, WILL WORK THEIR WAY BACK TO NICARAGUA. INCIDENTALLY, HE SAID IT WAS CLEAR TO HIM THAT THE REAL LEADER OF THE GUERRILLAS WAS NOT CAPTAIN ZERO BUT RATHER THE YOUNG WOMAN GUERRILLA WHO WAS IN THE GROUP THAT ATTACKED THE PALACE IN MANAGUA.

3. I TOLD TORRIJOS I WOULD CONVEY HIS THOUGHTS. I ALSO CAUTIONED HIM AGAINST ANY OPEN SUPPORT OF THE GUERRILLAS--WITH WEAPONS OR TRAINING--UNLESS THERE WAS SOME KIND OF UNDERSTANDING WITH US AND OTHERS THAT IT WAS JUSTIFIED OR USEFUL. HE SAID HE UNDERSTOOD. HE REPEATED HIS URGING IN FAVOR OF A U.S. INITIATIVE WITH SOMOZA SEVERAL TIMES.

4. ON THE POLITICAL FRONT, TORRIJOS GIVES EVERY INDICATION OF HAVING DECIDED TO REMAIN IN EFFECTIVE POWER FOR THE NEXT SIX YEARS. BUT HE TALKED AS THOUGH HE INTENDS TO DO THAT FROM HIS POSITION AS HEAD OF THE NATIONAL GUARD WITH SPECIAL POWERS. HE SAID HE WANTED A STRONG CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT AND HE AIMS TO GRADUALLY WEAN THE MILITARY FORCES FROM POLITICAL POWER. IT WILL HAVE TO BE DONE GRADUALLY AND WITH GREAT SKILL. HE MADE IT CLEAR HE THOUGHT HE WAS THE ONLY ONE WHO COULD CARRY THIS OUT. HE SOUNDED QUITE SINCERE. I URGED HIM, AS A BIT OF FINAL ADVICE, TO WORK STEADILY TO BROADEN THE POLITICAL BASE
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AND TO OPEN THE DOOR TO INCREASING PARTICIPATION BY THE OPPOSITION PARTIES, INDEED ALL SECTORS OF OPINION. HE SAID HE UNDERSTOOD THE IMPORTANCE OF THAT COURSE AND WOULD DO HIS BEST TO FOLLOW MY ADVICE. JORDEN

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